

A11.

WASHINGTON POST
17 March 1987

Costa Rica Says U.S. Intervened for Contras

Government Files Official Protest, Seeks Response on Tower Report

J

By Joanne Omang
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Costa Rican government formally charged yesterday that the United States has pressed it to be more cooperative in helping the Nicaraguan rebels.

In the first official protest it has ever filed on any subject with the United States, Costa Rica demanded a clarification of U.S. statements and positions reported by the Tower commission as part of its probe of the Iran-contra affair.

In a note delivered to the U.S. Embassy in San Jose, Costa Rica, and addressed to Secretary of State George P. Shultz, the government of President Oscar Arias referred to the Tower commission's report that a plane supplying aid to the Nicaraguan rebels—known as counter-revolutionaries or contras—had landed at a secret airstrip in Costa Rica on June 10, 1986, long after Arias had rejected U.S. requests and ordered the airstrip closed.

"If this is true, this constitutes a

violation of the neutrality of Costa Rica," Costa Rica's ambassador to the United States, Guido Fernandez, said in Washington.

The note also asked for official clarification of remarks the Tower panel attributed to Lewis A. Tambs, former U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica, in which he said his primary mission there would be to help the contras open a southern front in Nicaragua.

"This would be a flagrant violation of the accord not to use the territory of Costa Rica for military operations or logistical support against the government of Nicaragua," the note said.

Arias' government also repeated its denial of assertions by fired National Security Council aide Lt. Col. Oliver L. North that he had called Arias to threaten a cutoff of U.S. aid if he revealed the existence of the airstrip.

However, the note added, "Differences of focus that there have been with the U.S. government in this regard have caused instances in which Costa Rica was urged to change its attitude, and these instances have occurred in the past and were even repeated recently."

Costa Rican diplomats said the reference to past incidents was to efforts by Tambs last fall to win Arias' approval for continued use of the airstrip. The recent event was a January meeting in Costa Rica among Arias, White House National Security Adviser Frank C. Carlucci and President Reagan's special Central America envoy, Philip C. Habib.